

It has come to my astounded attention that the media giant, Sinclair Broadcasting, has told its 64 stations that they are required to preempt regular programming to air a blatantly political piece of smear propaganda about Senator Kerry just two weeks before the national election. What Sinclair calls a "documentary" was actually written, produced and funded by extreme right-wing activists. Sinclair is using its huge media reach to broadcast a blatantly political -- and false -- message, claiming it to be "news."

This illustrates absolutely clearly to me the terrible abuse that comes from relaxing rules governing media ownership to allow individual corporations to have so much clout (Sinclair reaches 25% of the national audience) that they can force a huge number of stations to broadcast their politically-slanted propaganda. This amounts to a theft of the public airwaves by a political agenda. The parallels to the old Soviet Union's monopoly of the "news" are obvious, and show the reasons for restricting media ownership in the first place.

Sinclair has violated the journalistic integrity of its stations before. While it claims that the current "documentary" is news, back in April it ordered its ABC affiliates not to air a nonpartisan (and very, very touching) tribute to the American soldiers who have died in Iraq, again for partisan political reasons. Sinclair refused to run an ad that challenged Bush for citing faulty intelligence about Iraq paid for by the Democratic National Committee. Sinclair forces its local stations to run a daily "commentary" segment by its corporate spokesman which calls the French "cheese eating surrender monkeys," and antiwar Congressman "unpatriotic politicians who hate our military." This is not news, it is flat-out mass media propaganda, made possible by the huge reach of one corporation.

As further proof of their blatant political agenda, Sinclair and its executives have contributed thousands of dollars to Republican causes -- and the CEO has given the maximum donation to Bush-Cheney 04.

Sinclair's current forcing of its 62 television stations to broadcast right-wing smears against John Kerry as news has fostered complaints that are already in process with the Federal Elections Commission to protest the illegality of this corporate contribution to the Bush campaign.

Sinclair uses our public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But

when large companies like Sinclair control the airwaves, we, the people who own those airwaves, get what's good for the corporation, not what we need for our democracy. Instead of something produced at corporate headquarters in another state (and in Sinclair's case dictated by their right-wing agenda), what we need is real people from our own communities reporting true and substantive news about issues that matter.

Sinclair's actions, which blatantly violate election law, show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. Thank you.